

Annual Results Report

2023

Iran (Islamic Republic of)

Acknowledgements

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- 4.1: Lessons Learned and Future Outlook

Section 1: Context and Overview

1.1 Changes to the Operational Context

The Islamic Republic of Iran continues to be the world's largest refugee-hosting country, having provided refuge to Afghans fleeing conflict and seeking international protection for more than 40 years. According to the latest information provided by the Government of Iran (Islamic Republic of), 762,000 refugee Amayesh and Hoviat card holders reside in Iran (Islamic Republic of). In 2022, the Government undertook a headcount of all undocumented Afghan nationals in the country, including those who arrived after the security situation in Afghanistan deteriorated following the events of August 2021. As a result, UNHCR was informed that 2.6 million Afghans received a 'headcount slip', providing this group with a form of temporary protection. The Office estimates that some 3.4 million refugees and asylum-seekers currently reside in Iran (Islamic Republic of) – including nearly 12,000 Iraqi refugee Hoviat card holders; additionally, around 600,000 Afghan passport holders with Iranian visas (some of whom are former Amayesh card holders), and 500,000 undocumented Afghans who did not or could not participate in the headcount. Therefore, the number of displaced people potentially in need of protection and assistance is approximately 4.5 million. While UNHCR is waiting for the final statistics to be shared by the Government, Iran's Government officials at the 2023 GRF mentioned that "more than 5 million refugees" are currently hosted in the country.

Despite many challenges, Iran (Islamic Republic of) maintained its inclusive policies by allowing everyone, regardless of their documentation situation, access to education and health services. However, the interconnected impact of local currency depreciation and skyrocketing inflation has prompted a cost-of-living crisis due to rising food and service costs. Without more responsibility-sharing, these inclusive policies may be curtailed and many Afghans, including children, could be left behind.

Greater needs and funding shortfalls will likely affect the Office's programme in Iran (Islamic Republic of), reducing its scope and constraining its ability to positively shape the protection environment for refugees. The country's deteriorating economic situation, coupled with UNHCR's reduced financial resources, will impact partnership agreements and activities. This will leave more vulnerable people without much-needed support, contributing to spiraling needs and greater reliance on negative coping mechanisms.

1.2. Progress Against the Desired Impact

1. Impact Area: Attaining Favorable Protection Environments

1) By end of 2024, all asylum-seekers have access to asylum systems and refugees and asylum-seekers enjoy improved access to social protection systems and UNHCR services following the adoption of progressive legal policies

The Government of Iran (Islamic Republic of) was responsible for registration, refugee status determination (RSD) and issuing documentation to people in need of international protection. Afghan nationals who were granted certain documents – including Amayesh cards, headcount slips and family passports – had access to different levels of social protection systems informed by their documentation situation. However, access to protection for Afghans and people of other nationalities remained challenging in 2023. Approximately 762,000 Amayesh and Hoviat card holders continued to enjoy State-provided protection. A considerable number of the 2.6 million Afghans had access to education and primary health services, including those who arrived after August 2021 and those already in-situ but undocumented who received headcount slips in 2022. These headcount slips provided temporary protection, including in principle from refoulement/deportation. While there was no individual asylum procedure in the country, the Government has continued to provide group status over the years although no decision was taken in 2023 regarding the situation of newly arrived Afghans who lacked status and were either unwilling or unable to return.

The Government of Iran introduced the General Smart Platform for Foreign Nationals and Migrants in 2023. This led to issuance of the Identification Card for Foreign Nationals and Immigrants (Unified Smart ID Card) with a 10-digit identity code aiming at harmonizing and consolidating different types of IDs that were previously issued to foreign nationals in Iran and providing a unified database for identification and services for foreign nationals. The new scheme was gradually implemented since June 2023 in phases, and the actual issuance of the card was reported since November 2023, first targeting Amayesh and Hoviat card holders and students who had registered in the government's education platform at the initial stage.

The Office will continue to advocate for access to legal status and documentation for newly-arrived Afghans with its main Government partner, the National Organization for Migration (NOM) of the Ministry of Interior. UNHCR issued a global non-return advisory for Afghanistan in August 2021 and a guidance note on the international protection needs of people fleeing Afghanistan in February 2022. Despite the advisory, practical access to protection for those in need remained a challenge in 2023

2. Impact Area: Realizing Rights in Safe Environments

2) By 2024, inclusive policies of GIRI across all public services (health, education, social protection and financial inclusion) will continue to be maintained and become further refined, affordable and sustainable for refugees and asylum-seekers

Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Actual (2023)
2.2 Proportion of people residing in physically safe and secure settlements with access to basic facilities	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	89.67%	89.67%
2.3 Proportion of people with access to health services	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	90.00%	92.00%

As part of inclusive, Government-led policies, all Afghans and Iraqis have access to free primary health care services similar to nationals countrywide and regardless of their documentation situation. This includes – but is not limited to – vaccination and immunization campaigns, ante- and post-natal care, mother and childcare, growth monitoring for children under five, communicable disease care and treatment, non-

communicable disease care and family planning. In 2023, UNHCR supported these inclusive policies through a partnership with NOM and the Ministry of Health and Medical Education, focusing on more than 10 refugee-hosting provinces.

While secondary and tertiary health care was also available to all, the costs of these services remained a barrier for most. To mitigate this, the Office has supported a Government-led initiative since 2015 that provides refugees access to national universal public health insurance and avails treatments to the most vulnerable refugees at a subsidized cost. In 2023, UNHCR covered the premium fees for 97,032 of the most vulnerable refugees – 95,000 through a partnership agreement with the Iran Health Insurance Organization and 2,032 people (including individuals with special diseases such as Hemophilia, Thalassemia, Renal Failure, Kidney Transplant, and Multiple Sclerosis) through an UN-to-UN agreement with UNFPA.

Since 2015, and as per the Supreme Leader’s Decree, all Afghan students, including those undocumented, have access to primary and secondary education. In addition, since May 2016, refugee-specific fees between \$70 and \$90 have been waived to ensure Afghan students receive an education similar to host country students. Despite these progressive and inclusive policies, challenges remain. Educational infrastructure is overstretched due to the large number of children enrolled at public schools. More than 700,000 refugees are enrolled in the national education system, according to the Government statement at the 2023 GRF. In 2023, UNHCR supported the construction of ten (10) 12-classroom schools located in the refugee hosting provinces serving both refugees and Iranians inclusively. Enhanced responsibility-sharing by the international community will be needed to support Iran’s (Islamic Republic of) national education system in 2023

3. Impact Area: Empowering Communities and Achieving Gender Equality

3) By 2024, improved self-sufficiency and self-management is realized by refugees and asylum-seekers as a result of the advancement in inclusive economic policies and access to national social networks and community based mechanisms

Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Actual (2023)
3.1 Proportion of people who have the right to decent work	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	40.00%	19.77%
3.2a Proportion of children and young people enrolled in primary education	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	88.00%	88.00%
3.2b Proportion of children and young people enrolled in secondary education	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	73.00%	73.00%

UNHCR promoted the importance of gender equality within communities by working to challenge and transform underlying power dynamics and traditional gender roles. Through robust capacity building and advocacy, UNHCR increased the overall resilience and wellbeing of community members and equally contributed to advancing gender equality. The Office launched thematic protection interventions, including livelihood programmes, to economically empower refugee women through livelihoods by enabling them to participate in the decision-making process.

Despite several challenges, UNHCR worked with Governmental and non-Governmental partners to build refugees’ capacities, facilitate access to wages and self-employment and support self-reliance as part of its annual livelihood programmes being implemented in Iran. Such projects contribute towards the enhanced capacity of the refugee population in the country and to be able to sustain their livelihoods and contribute positively to the host community during their stay in Iran but also prepare them to better contribute to the rebuilding of Afghanistan (their country of origin) once situation for voluntary return is conducive.

4. Impact Area: Securing Solutions

4) Durable solutions are secured for refugees and asylum-seekers, through a combination of local solutions/inclusion, voluntary return, complementary pathways and resettlement, when appropriate

Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Actual (2023)
4.1 Number of refugees who voluntarily return in safety and dignity to their country of origin	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	947	521

UNHCR has supported nearly 1 million refugees in Iran (Islamic Republic of) to voluntarily repatriate in safety and dignity to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and Iraq since 2002. In 2023, the Office facilitated the voluntary repatriation of 521 people, including 516 Afghans and five Iraqis – a 27% increase from 2022. Refugees chose to return for various reasons: to be with family, financial constraints in Iran (Islamic Republic of), or to acquire documentation from their countries of origin. The Office provided support to 59 Afghan students so that they could obtain their passports and attend university in Iran (Islamic Republic of).

In 2023, UNHCR strengthened structures and processes established in 2022 as part of resettlement upscaling. The focus was on nationalizing resettlement staff and capacity building and training to bolster case identification and resettlement referrals. The Office submitted 3,274 refugee cases for resettlement consideration and 1,489 refugees departed. Collaboration with the Government of Iran (Islamic Republic of) – which views resettlement as an important responsibility-sharing mechanism that highlights its role as one of the largest refugee-hosting countries – was enhanced. Exit procedures improved during the reporting period and Afghan refugees were no longer required to hold Afghan passports to leave Iran (Islamic Republic of). As a result, most refugees departed using country-issued resettlement travel documents.

UNHCR consolidated its complementary pathways programme in Iran (Islamic Republic of) in 2023. 612 people were able to access family reunification, labour, and education mobility schemes, or humanitarian admission programmes. The majority (563 people of the 612) accessed family reunification – a 75% increase from the 322 people assisted with reunification in 2022. However, there was a lack of data on family reunification departures since these took place without UNHCR intervention and the Office can only report the 28 departures it was informed of. Nevertheless, UNHCR continued to expand complementary pathways and explore additional programmes such as Brazil's humanitarian visa pilot programme.

1.3 Challenges to Achieving Impacts

Iran (Islamic Republic of) has generously hosted Afghan and Iraqi refugees for decades and implemented inclusive health care and education policies. However, in recent years, the socioeconomic situation of refugees in Iran (Islamic Republic of) has worsened. A volatile economy has seen the prices of basic commodities, accommodation, services and utilities rise significantly, leaving many refugees (mostly Afghans) particularly vulnerable.

Recurrent waves of anti-Afghan rhetoric, which hit a peak in late 2023, further complicated their situation. With no predictable legal framework for asylum procedures, people in need of international protection were left in limbo and vulnerable to abuse and negative coping mechanisms. Legislation regulating NOM was awaiting parliamentary approval at year-end. Public statements regarding restrictive approaches towards undocumented foreigners put Afghans in a more vulnerable position and created avenues for onward movements or premature and involuntary return to Afghanistan. Restricted access to full data and limited operational space remained a challenge.

Reduced funding for the refugee response impacted UNHCR's leverage to advance its protection mandate, particularly during a challenging economic period for the host country. Providing limited cash assistance without sustained protection efforts had also limited impact on most lives. Resettlement places and its current focus on the protracted population curbed concrete outcomes for new arrivals. UNHCR's community engagement remained essential but challenging, with certain compromises needed in community-based

protection practices due to the overall context. To address this, UNHCR reception areas and outreach tools were enhanced, although it remained insufficient to meet all needs.

Given the widespread reliance on informal and daily labour arrangements among forcibly displaced and stateless people in Iran (Islamic Republic of), as well as a considerable number of households living below or at the edge of subsistence levels, Afghans were particularly vulnerable to negative coping mechanisms. Greater international responsibility-sharing is needed to support Iran in maintaining its inclusive policies and services and UNHCR's programmes in the country to ensure Afghans are not left behind.

1.4 Collaboration and Partnerships

Building on the activation of the 2021 Refugee Coordination Model in Iran (Islamic Republic of), UNHCR consolidated its partnerships with international aid partners principally under the umbrella of the 2023 Refugee Response Plan (RRP) for the Afghanistan Situation. UNHCR continued to lead coordination under the Refugee Coordination Model and convened a Refugee Response Group comprised of UN agencies and INGOs engaged in the RRP response. The Refugee Response Group provides overall strategic leadership, oversees joint inter-agency planning and prioritization under the RRP, facilitates joint advocacy (particularly regarding the Government), and develops common operating standards framed by joint operating principles. This platform provides an opportunity to review achievements and recalibrate strategies under the RRP, while also giving smaller partners an opportunity to flag issues of concern.

Operational coordination among the 15 RRP partners continued to be supported through seven sector working groups, facilitating regular information exchange, robust collaboration in multi-agency response contexts, and joint strategic planning, including for the 2024-2025 RRP. UNHCR led or co-led four of these sectors, including Protection, Shelter NFI, Cash and Health. It also actively participated in all sectors working groups as part of an inclusive and collaborative approach to coordination. UNHCR convened the Inter-Sector Coordination Group and led key inter-sectoral processes. The 5Ws (who/what/when/where/to whom) served as the basis for operational coordination among partners and the monitoring and reporting framework for the 2023 RRP.

In its observatory role to the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), the Office continues to work with a diverse number of international aid organizations across to identify and exploit complementarities between the RRP and the UNSDCF. This has included efforts to refine and expand area-based programmes that provide social services – mostly health, nutrition and education – to both Afghan populations and vulnerable Iranians alike and to diversify partnerships under the RRP in consultation with the Government. By strengthening these synergies, UNHCR sought to further explore and promote nexus approaches to address the needs on the ground more sustainably.

In 2023, RRP partners prioritized support to inclusive education services in Iran (Islamic Republic of). The country offered the best opportunity to invest in the education of Afghan girls and women, who were excluded from secondary education in Afghanistan. In this regard, RRP partners called on increased responsibility-sharing to ensure Afghan children and young people do not become a lost generation.

In addition, at the Global Refugee Forum in December 2023, the principle of responsibility-sharing with host countries and communities, such as Iran (Islamic Republic of) was reaffirmed. This is in line with the Global Compact on Refugees, which aims to ease pressure on host countries, enhance refugee self-reliance, expand third country solutions, and support conditions for return in safety and dignity.

Moreover, UNHCR enjoyed constructive engagement with NOM, its main Government counterpart. In 2023, the Office regularly flagged concerns to NOM regarding the protection status of many Afghans in Iran (Islamic Republic of). UNHCR continued to work with 13 direct implementing partners, including five from Government, six NGOs and two UN agencies, which enabled the Office to ring fence a budget to advance inclusive policies and focus on joint efforts to protect refugees' rights

Section 2: Results

2.1. Outcomes and Achievements

1. Outcome Area: Access to Territory, Reg. and Documentation

1.2 By the end of 2024, increased number of people in need of UNHCR assistance/interventions are registered on individual basis

Progress Against the Desired Outcome

In 2023, 58,767 new people were enrolled in proGres in Iran (Islamic Republic of), which is UNHCR's main repository for storing peoples' data – a 62% increase from 2022. This provided them with access to assistance and solutions such as cash, voluntary repatriation and resettlement. A data cleanup exercise verified and fixed more than 600,000 errors. Although the Office experienced some challenges accessing the system due to global migration processes, UNHCR was still able to achieve its 2023 enrollment targets.

3. Outcome Area: Protection Policy and Law

1.1 By 2024, national policies will be enacted to enhance access to documentation, legal assistance and legal remedies for persons in need of international protection

Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Target (2023)	Actual (2023)
3.1 Extent national legal framework is in line with the 1951 Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol	None	Progressing towards alignment: 70-89 points	Progressing towards alignment:	Progressing towards alignment: 70-89 points

Progress Against the Desired Outcome

UNHCR advocated for national policies that enhanced access to documentation, legal assistance and legal remedies for people needing international protection. This advocacy sought to ensure such policies were aligned with the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and other applicable international instruments and standards. In 2023, the Office submitted at least nine advocacy letters on subjects related to the right to access territory and seek asylum, protection from refoulement, and the 2019 Nationality Law Amendment, which safeguards against statelessness.

This advocacy was carried out during a period of structural change for the Government department responsible for immigration and refugee affairs. The Bill on Establishing NOM remained under review by the Iranian Parliament. Meanwhile the Ministry of Interior established NOM without waiting for the bill to be passed, and the entity already functions as the de facto UNHCR counterpart. The establishment of NOM will potentially reshape the country's asylum framework. In addition, the current draft includes a provision for the revocation of the 2019 Nationality Law Amendment, which allowed children born to Iranian women and non-Iranian men to acquire nationality.

The deportation of Afghans from Iran (Islamic Republic of) – mainly undocumented or single men – continued during the reporting period despite a UNHCR non-return advisory which was reinforced in a

guidance note on the international protection needs of people fleeing Afghanistan There was limited space for UNHCR to intervene and advance its advocacy Registered refugees also needed to obtain a travel permit from NOM to travel outside their designated province of residence or risk deportation..

In 2023, UNHCR provided legal assistance to refugees and stateless people through 16 dispute settlement committees and 18 UNHCR-hired lawyers under its legal service projects in 19 provinces. Dispute settlement committees are an alternative mechanism for Afghan refugees to resolve issues for free, expeditiously and through mediation, in addition to the formal legal system. These committees are made up of NOM officials, judges and UNHCR-hired lawyers. Although the committees' decisions are non-binding, parties involved in the dispute respect the outcomes, including Afghan refugees and Iranian nationals. The role of UNHCR-hired lawyers expanded beyond their participation in these committees to provide free legal counseling, aid and representation to refugees and other people in need. In 2023, these lawyers provided consultations to 9,673 people. Most of the cases supported were covered family disputes followed by other civil and financial disputes as well as criminal cases. Dispute settlement committees provided mediation to 2,321 people on property, family, and financial disputes.

4. Outcome Area: Gender-based Violence

1.2. GBV survivors are identified, have access and are aware of existing/ strengthened support services, including national support systems

Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Target (2023)	Actual (2023)
4.1 Proportion of people who know where to access available GBV services	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	Unknown	15.00%	10.00%

Progress Against the Desired Outcome

UNHCR sought to strengthen the overall protection environment in Iran (Islamic Republic of) for forcibly displaced and stateless people in 2023 to ensure they are able to fully enjoy their rights and live with dignity and freedom from violence. To achieve this, UNHCR focused on the prevention, mitigation, and response to gender-based violence and aligning it with the “policy on the prevention of, risk mitigation and response to gender-based violence”.

The Office strengthened existing response mechanisms for gender-based violence incidents by developing reporting methodology and service mapping and disseminating simplified referral pathways. Protection assistance for gender-based violence survivors included meeting their basic needs and providing tailored cash assistance, with a view to reducing people's exposure to gender-based violence risks and their reliance on negative coping mechanisms. Focus on supporting access to livelihoods remained important to prevent violence by contributing towards healthy community economies and responding to survivors' livelihood needs.

To ensure the sustainability of these efforts, UNHCR sought to build the capacity of local NGOs. In 2023, it signed a partnership agreement with the Iranian NGO Association for Protection of Refugee Women and Children – also known as HAMI – to provide services for gender-based violence survivors. A workshop for HAMI staff in Semnan province sought to enhance their expertise and referral mechanisms for gender-based violence survivors. Among the topics covered were the safe disclosure of gender-based violence and guiding principles, including for the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse. UNHCR also ran other training sessions tailored to the needs of gender-based violence caseworkers and frontline staff. UNHCR regularly updated its standard operating procedures to ensure its practices were responsive to ongoing changes in Iran (Islamic Republic of). To gauge the effectiveness of its services, the Office sought the perspective of gender-based violence survivors to ensure UNHCR's support remains survivor-centred. The Office also initiated psychological and social group counseling sessions specifically for community members with complex sensitivities. This marked a significant step forward despite the existing sensitivities surrounding the issue.

5. Outcome Area: Child Protection

1.3. Children are protected from violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation and discrimination and have access to child friendly procedures and inclusive national services

Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Target (2023)	Actual (2023)
5.1 Proportion of children at heightened risk who are supported by a Best Interests Procedure	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	35.00%	65.00%	61.13%

Progress Against the Desired Outcome

UNHCR sought to support the development of an effective child protection system in Iran (Islamic Republic of) that prevents and responds to the needs of children at risk in 2023. It also worked to provide comprehensive and multi-faceted child protection case management services such as psychological and social support, cash assistance, legal assistance, and durable solutions. There was a considerable increase (more than 50%) in the number of children at risk who were identified and able to access services compared to 2022. However, data collected by UNHCR in Iran (Islamic Republic of) showed refugee children were at risk of child labour and not accessing education and documentation. This was despite the absence of a national partner that could provide services to Afghan refugees. The Supreme Leader's decree in 2015 provided refugee and undocumented Afghan children with access to primary and secondary education within the national system. Despite the country's progressive educational policy, Afghan children faced barriers that hindered their access to education. An increase in the number of Afghans in Iran (Islamic Republic of) placed more pressure on educational infrastructure. In September 2023, the Minister of Education reported that approximately 600,000 foreign national students were to be enrolled in schools.

Birth registration remained a fundamental prerequisite for basic rights and an important measure against statelessness. The number of children born to Iranian mothers married to non-Iranian men, as per the 2019 nationality law amendment, were reflected in a report by the National Center for Cultural Observance. The report indicated that by March 2023, 109,198 people had applied for naturalization and 15,800 Shenanamehs (Iranian nationality IDs) had been issued. UNHCR closely followed legislative developments with the Nationality Bill and advocated for continued access to the scheme.

7. Outcome Area: Community Engagement and Women's Empowerment

3.1 By 2024, diverse refugees and asylum-seekers are better informed and are able to participate in a progressively more meaningful manner with UNHCR, the Government and partners in programme design, implementation and evaluation while also being able to access safe and effective feedback and response mechanisms

Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Target (2023)	Actual (2023)
7.2 Proportion of people who have access to safe feedback and response mechanisms	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	25.00%	35.00%	10.00%

Progress Against the Desired Outcome

In 2023, the Office's hotline remained one of the most effective means of communication with communities. It responded to 54,339 queries from refugees, helping identify people in need of protection and referring them to the appropriate support. Additionally, 74,014 refugees and asylum-seekers engaged

with UNHCR in its reception areas in 2023, participating in group counseling sessions. Of them, 11% were identified as needing further support. Communication with forcibly displaced and stateless people also extended to emails and letters via a dedicated email address and feedback and complaints boxes located in UNHCR offices. In total, 67,485 emails were received and processed.

In 2023, UNHCR enhanced its reporting capabilities on community-based protection by implementing a harmonized reporting template. This strategic development facilitated the timely and systematic reporting of feedback and complaints, disaggregated by sex and age, alongside the corresponding responses.

The feedback and response mechanism – which received inputs from refugees and asylum-seekers – operated through confidential channels such as dedicated protection mailboxes, hotlines and reception centres in each UNHCR office across the country. Based on the survey's findings, standard operating procedures for the feedback, complaints and response mechanisms were formulated and close to finalization. This initiative was undertaken to fortify existing practices of receiving, storing, capturing, and recording feedback within the operation.

The standard operating procedures provided a unified and holistic approach to handling feedback and complaints, encompassing various communication methods from in-person interactions to engagements on social media platforms. Moreover, the Office introduced a tracking tool designed to record response times. This tool – which contributed to closing the feedback loop – was tailored to capture feedback and complaints from all sources, categorize response times, identify receiving focal points, and track the nature of the provided responses.

To enhance UNHCR's understanding and responsiveness to the information needs and communication preferences of forcibly displaced and stateless people in Iran (Islamic Republic of), the Office successfully concluded a comprehensive communication with communities survey. This survey was designed to yield specific, actionable and disaggregated data, serving as a guiding resource for communication with communities programming. Its primary objective was to ensure UNHCR actions and activities were aligned with the needs, capacities and preferences of communities under its care. Employing a thoughtful combination of stratified and convenience sampling methods and run with 640 participants, the survey underscored UNHCR's commitment to integrating the voices of refugees and asylum-seekers into the heart of its decision-making processes. The insights from this survey played a pivotal role in shaping strategies and actions, guaranteeing their effectiveness and ensuring these were aligned with UNHCR's objectives in Iran (Islamic Republic of).

8. Outcome Area: Well-Being and Basic Needs

2.1. Services and assistance to support the most vulnerable people to cover their basic needs is extended and strengthened through an inclusive approach (where possible) with a particular focus on persons with specific needs

Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Target (2023)	Actual (2023)
8.1 Proportion of people that receive cash transfers and/or non-food items	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	60.00%	61.00%	33.17%

Progress Against the Desired Outcome

The volatile economic situation has meant UNHCR and its partners have had to monitor cost levels in Iran (Islamic Republic of). In its capacity as co-lead of the Cash Working Group in Iran (Islamic Republic of), UNHCR and other partners (WFP, NRC, and RI) conducted a joint minimum expenditure basket exercise to review the cost of refugees' basic needs, including food, shelter, CRIs, health care and transportation. The process indicated that the cost of living increased by 51% in a year. While the estimated average monthly income for vulnerable Afghan households also increased, the gap between their estimated income and expenditure had increased by 40%. It was clear refugees were finding it increasingly difficult to meet their basic needs.

Based on the study's findings, UNHCR revised its cash assistance in Iran (Islamic Republic of) to better meet the needs of refugees and asylum-seekers living in poverty. A two-level eligibility determination process was proposed: categorical vulnerabilities and vulnerability scorecards. Depending on the results of these assessments, refugees are eligible for recurrent cash assistance for three or six months as well as shock-responsive or sector-specific cash assistance. In 2023, 15,948 households (75,195 people) received cash assistance, a 126% increase from the previous year. In addition, 91 Iraqi households (306 people) received cash assistance through a partnership agreement with IRAC.

Post-distribution monitoring revealed that of the 928 Afghan refugees who received cash assistance in early April 2023, most (94%) were from urban areas, 56% had access to a bank account and more than half (54%) were women. Fluctuating prices meant 63% of households experienced a sharp reduction in their purchasing power and were unable to meet their basic needs and most surveyed (87%) resorted to one or more negative coping strategies. The findings underlined the effect of inflation on household purchasing power and refugees' vulnerabilities and highlighted the need to review the minimum expenditure basket in the Cash Working Group.

Around 77 percent of refugee households reported that their living conditions had improved moderately to significantly due to UNHCR cash assistance. In addition, more than 80% of respondents reported that cash assistance reduced their stress levels and more than a third (36%) of refugees confirmed their ability to meet their most pressing basic needs, a 29% growth.

To improve refugees' living conditions, UNHCR also supported the construction of 372 shelters and, in partnership with three local NGOs, ensured 9,092 people with specific needs received the services they needed in four provinces.

10. Outcome Area: Healthy Lives

2.3 Refugees and asylum-seekers maintain inclusive and affordable access to primary, secondary and tertiary healthcare over duration of multi-year plan

Progress Against the Desired Outcome

All Afghans and Iraqis, regardless of their documentation, have access to free primary health care services similar to nationals countrywide, including but not limited to vaccinations and immunizations, ante- and post-natal care, under-five children's growth monitoring, and communicable and non-communicable disease care and treatment. In 2023, UNHCR continued to support health-inclusive policies through a partnership with NOM and the Ministry of Health and Medical Education.

While secondary and tertiary health care remained available to all, the high costs of these services remained a barrier for most. To mitigate this, since 2015, UNHCR has supported a Government-led initiative to provide refugees with access to the national Universal Public Health Insurance. Through the initiative, refugees can access treatments at reduced costs. In 2023, UNHCR covered the premium fee for 97,032 refugees, including 95,000 through a partnership with the Iran Health Insurance Organization and 2,032 of the most vulnerable refugees through a UN to UN agreement with UNFPA that facilitates their subsidized access to public hospitals. However, the number of vulnerable refugees whose health care costs were covered by UNHCR dropped significantly in 2023 due to a reduction in UNHCR's financial resources, impacting 25,000 people.

Since 2015 and in line with the Supreme Leader's Decree, all Afghan students, regardless of their documentation status, have had access to education. In addition, since May 2016, refugee-specific fees of between \$70 and \$90 have been waived. Despite these progressive and inclusive policies, refugee and undocumented students still face challenges. The education infrastructure is overstretched due to a large number of students arriving in the country in 2023 and the costs associated with supporting their education, including for uniforms, insurance and the commute. In 2023, UNHCR sought to share the costs with the Government by supporting a package of education interventions, including the construction of 10 schools,

each with 12 classrooms, to help accommodate the approximately 800,000 Afghan students. However, this contribution alone will not meet the country's significant need for educational space.

11. Outcome Area: Education

2.2 Refugees and asylum-seekers maintain an inclusive and equitable access to the primary and secondary education system in Iran over duration of multi-year plan

Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Target (2023)	Actual (2023)
11.2 Proportion of children and young people enrolled in the national education system	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	80.00%	82.00%	82.00%

Progress Against the Desired Outcome

UNHCR supported refugees' access to safe learning spaces in 2023 by co-funding the construction of schools with the Ministry of Education in support of an inclusive approach to education and to ease overcrowding in classrooms in refugee-hosting areas. The construction and completion of 10 schools was initiated in 2023 in five provinces and provided additional safe learning spaces for around 3,600 refugee and host community children, who attended in two shifts. 112,280 school kits containing stationery were also distributed to students in 20 provinces.

In close collaboration with NOM and Pars Development Actors Institute, 449 vulnerable refugee university students were supported through the DAFI Scholarship Scheme, which gives young refugee women and men with a secondary education diploma the opportunity to pursue higher education in their first country of asylum.

13. Outcome Area: Self Reliance, Economic Inclusion and Livelihoods

3.2 By 2024, an increased number of refugees and asylum-seekers enjoy expanded and diversified livelihood opportunities

Progress Against the Desired Outcome

In 2023, 978 refugees had access to vocational training and income generation opportunities through UNHCR partnerships with Government and NGO partners, including the Technical and Vocational Training Organization (TVTO) (923 refugees) and Iranian Life Quality Empowerment (ILIA) (55 female refugees). Technical and vocational training courses provided these refugees with new income-generating skills in hairdressing, candle making, tailoring and auto mechanics.

The above mentioned TVTO trainings took place across 42 centres in 18 provinces, including Alborz, Bushehr, Esfahan, Fars, Golestān, Hormozgan, Ilam, Kerman, Kermanshah, Khuzestan, Lorestan, Markazi, Qazvin, Qom, Razavi Khorasan, Semnan, South Khorasan and Yazd. Moreover, within Tehran province and with UNHCR support, ILIA extended its services to those 55 females beyond technical and vocational training by delivering life skills and business skills sessions as well. ILIA later facilitated the production and sale of items made by the women through the organization's online platform Madarya as well as charity markets, fostering income generation opportunities for them.

14. Outcome Area: Voluntary Return and Sustainable Reintegration

4.1 Potential for voluntary return realized

Progress Against the Desired Outcome

Since 2002, UNHCR has supported nearly 1 million refugees in Iran (Islamic Republic of) to voluntarily repatriate in safety and dignity to Afghanistan and Iraq. In 2022, the Office facilitated voluntary repatriation whilst considering the UNHCR's non-return advisory and global guidance note on the international protection needs of people fleeing Afghanistan. In 2023, UNHCR facilitated the repatriation of 516 returnees to Afghanistan and five to Iraq. This represents a 37% increase on the 379 returns facilitated in the same period of 2022. The Office offered support to those opting to return, aiming to ensure such returns were informed, voluntary, safe and dignified.

15. Outcome Area: Resettlement and Complementary Pathways

4.2 Increased number of people in need of resettlement identified, and submitted for resettlement

Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Target (2023)	Actual (2023)
15.1 Number of refugees submitted by UNHCR for resettlement	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	56	3,200	3,274

Progress Against the Desired Outcome

In 2023, 3,274 Afghan refugees were submitted for resettlement. Only the most vulnerable refugees falling under UNHCR's resettlement submission categories were submitted. The majority (66%) were female-headed households and nearly half (42%) were children under the age of 18. The focus of resettlement submissions was on Amayesh card holders at the request of the Government of Iran (Islamic Republic of), while 117 Afghans (arrived after 2021) were also submitted.

Resettlement activities were UNHCR-led but with essential support from the Government of Iran (Islamic Republic of), resettlement countries and IOM. UNHCR strengthened cooperation with the Government throughout the year in all areas of resettlement processing. Resettlement countries supported these efforts through their pledges and applicant processing, and UNHCR successfully facilitated remote and face-to-face selection missions. IOM also organized travel for refugees accepted for resettlement and cultural orientation sessions.

In 2023, UNHCR focused on consolidating the resettlement upscaling exercise initiated in 2022. Existing systems and processes were continuously reviewed and strengthened to identify further efficiencies. For example, a merged RSD and resettlement processing method for Afghan women and children was piloted. The nationalization of resettlement staff continued and, by the year-end, resettlement casework was entrusted to national colleagues (except for International Catholic Migration Commission employees). Continued capacity-building training was provided to all staff working in resettlement, with 14 training sessions conducted for 360 staff working in case identification, credibility assessments, interviewing, drafting and proGres v4. Efforts were taken to bolster the identification of people eligible for resettlement. To support this, a new internal resettlement referral system was created and implemented.

To support third countries durable solutions, the Office enhanced complementary pathways programmes for people in need of international protection as new pathways continued to be explored. In total, 612 people

received direct assistance to access complementary pathways and UNHCR was informed of 28 departures. Most (563) people were assisted to access family reunification services, five people were assisted to access education pathways, 16 were able to benefit from private sponsorship programmes, 26 people benefited from humanitarian pathways and two accessed a labour pathway through Talent Beyond Boundaries, an organization that connects refugees to international job opportunities. The Office also explored additional pathways such as the Brazil humanitarian visa pilot programme. Funding from the UNHCR Innovation Fund helped support a project on Digital Bridges for Afghan Scholars for 2024 to promote overseas study opportunities for Afghan students in Iran (Islamic Republic of) through information sharing and linking interested students with successful scholarship applicants from previous years.

2.2. Age, Gender and Diversity

In November 2023, UNHCR launched a feedback and response system that allows to receive, document, maintain, refer and respond to feedback received. This system provides a detailed breakdown of gender and age-related information and records diversity markers such as disability. By year-end, this system had recorded 436 queries. More than half of those (57%) came from women refugees aged 25 to 59. Another 22% were submitted by male refugees within the same age category and 4% included reports of disability, either pertaining to the individual contacting UNHCR or a member of their family.

To better incorporate refugees' preferences into UNHCR decision-making, through Communication with Communities, UNHCR sought to better understand what information was required by those forcibly displaced, including how they would like to receive this information, and promote the inclusion of people with disabilities. Among 640 people that UNHCR communicated with, 32% were women refugees aged between 25 and 44 and 28% were men within the same age category. UNHCR also focused on understanding the communication needs of those with visual, physical, and hearing impairments. This approach aimed to comprehensively capture and address the refugee community's diverse communication needs.

Section 3: Resources

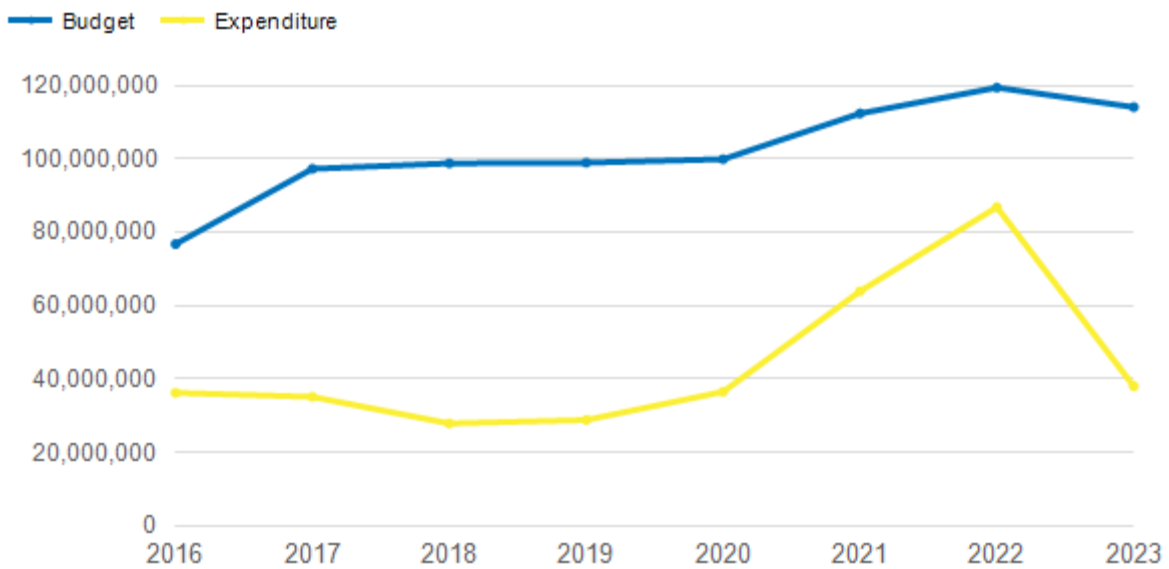
3.1 Financial Data

(Financial figures in USD)

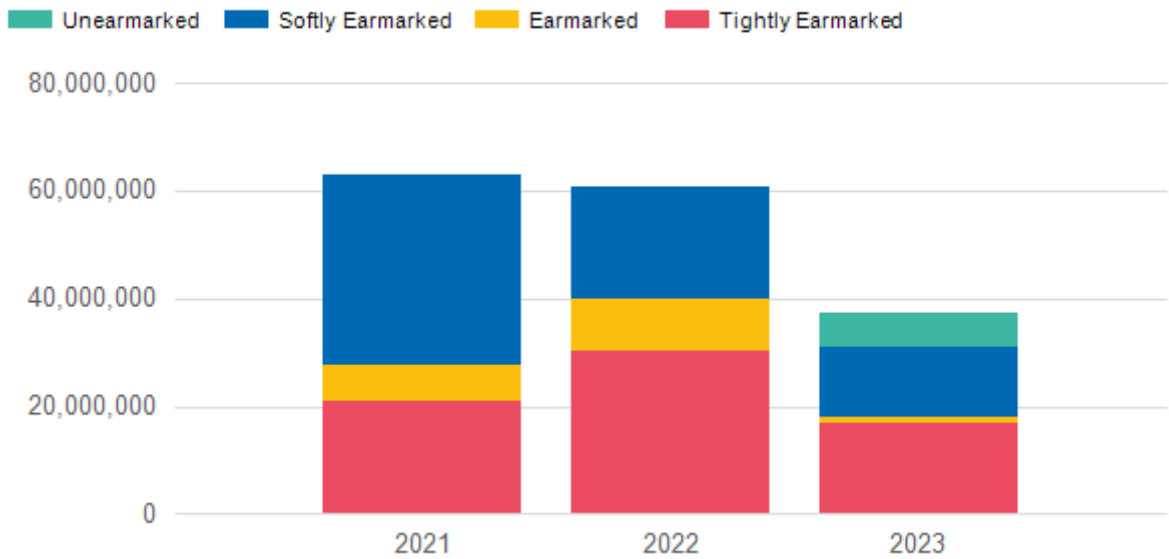
Impact Area	Final Budget	Funds Available	Funds Available as % of Budget	Expenditure	Expenditure as % of Funds Available
IA1: Protect	14,346,243	3,486,820	24.30%	2,317,866	66.48%
IA2: Assist	80,091,052	26,791,456	33.45%	26,438,906	98.68%
IA3: Empower	5,586,610	1,359,456	24.33%	1,359,456	100.00%
IA4: Solve	14,047,910	7,890,121	56.17%	7,890,121	100.00%
All Impact Areas		1,870,587			
Total	114,071,815	41,398,439	36.29%	38,006,349	91.81%

Outcome Area	Final Budget	Funds Available	Funds Available as % of Budget	Expenditure	Expenditure as % of Funds Available
OA1: Access/Doc	81,887	43,352	52.94%	43,352	100.00%
OA3: Policy/Law	8,490,195	2,013,707	23.72%	735,702	36.53%
OA4: GBV	2,089,645	641,491	30.70%	641,491	100.00%
OA5: Children	1,294,844	284,459	21.97%	284,459	100.00%
OA7: Community	1,390,873	717,314	51.57%	717,314	100.00%
OA8: Well-being	29,295,406	9,951,706	33.97%	9,951,706	100.00%
OA10: Health	23,758,554	13,870,970	58.38%	11,756,896	84.76%
OA11: Education	16,707,948	3,311,491	19.82%	3,311,491	100.00%
OA13: Livelihood	4,195,737	642,142	15.30%	642,142	100.00%
OA14: Return	4,573,744	3,016,800	65.96%	3,016,800	100.00%
OA15: Resettle	9,474,166	4,873,321	51.44%	4,873,321	100.00%
EA18: Support	10,329,144	1,418,814	13.74%	1,418,814	100.00%
EA20: External	2,389,671	612,862	25.65%	612,862	100.00%
All Outcome Areas		11			
Total	114,071,815	41,398,439	36.29%	38,006,349	91.81%

Budget and Expenditure Trend



Contributions Trend by Type



3.2. Resources Overview

Just over a third (35%) of UNHCR’s programmes in Iran were funded in 2023. This represents a significant drop since 2022, when the operation was 97% funded. It is important to recognize this has happened at a time when the number of recorded refugees in Iran (Islamic Republic of) has increased to 3.4 from 0.8 million at the start of 2022, with the inclusion of 2.6 million head counted Afghans. This massive decline presented a critical challenge and jeopardized the Office’s ability to deliver crucial protection and assistance for refugees as well as advocate for their needs.

Moreover, UNHCR’s capacity to continue providing inclusive basic services such as shelter, health care and education was hindered by a considerable decrease in responsibility sharing by the international community. The prospect of further cuts loomed large, casting a shadow over the future of refugee

protection and response in the country. Against this bleak backdrop, UNHCR worked to find innovative solutions and alternative sources of funding to fill the gap. The support of non-traditional donors, private sector partnerships and other UN agencies was sought, while advocacy efforts continued to appeal to the international community in Iran (Islamic Republic of) and, where possible, in the capitals of donor countries. Despite these actions, sustaining effective protection for refugees in the face of financial constraints remained daunting.

As the situation grew more dire, UNHCR faced tough decisions regarding the prioritization of essential protection services. This resulted in deprioritizing of some key partnerships with long-standing implementing partners and reallocating funds to the most critical areas, including health and education. Reinstating partnerships, where momentum was lost, proved difficult. The delicate balance between meeting the immediate needs of refugees and ensuring long-term sustainability in the face of uncertain funding was extremely challenging.

Section 4: Lessons Learned and Future Outlook

4.1 Lessons Learned and Future Outlook

While engaging with forcibly displaced people in Iran (Islamic Republic of) was crucial to UNHCR's work, it also remained a challenge, partially because refugees live among host communities in many parts of the country. To tackle this challenge, the Office adopted new approaches such as improving refugee reception areas, which enabled it to provide counseling to 74,859 people. It also strengthened its two-way communication tools to receive more feedback from forcibly displaced and stateless people (93,578 people). Furthermore, by establishing support desks, UNHCR was able to contact 2,425 people who could not access UNHCR offices because they lived in remote areas or faced further challenges. Additionally, UNHCR printed and distributed leaflets and implemented various innovative ideas to improve its help webpage and overcome these challenges.

Traditional outreach modalities to women and girls remained challenging in 2023 and risked contributing to the underreporting of gender-based violence and other protection-related dangers. The Office sought to find solutions to these challenges which included working with nontraditional groups such as clerics, teachers, and influential men and women.

Further consultation and coordination with Government counterparts to allow UNHCR unlimited and unhindered access to refugees and asylum-seekers is required. An efficient multi-functional team approach that has built trusted relationships with colleagues and partners can positively affect UNHCR's work and help ensure protection-related messaging is shared consistently with NOM through its units and offices. Communication with refugees and asylum-seekers will continue to be bolstered in 2024, particularly the feedback, complaints, and response mechanisms. It should be noted that UNHCR has limited autonomy to reach out to refugees, which makes it extremely difficult for community-based protection staff to enhance their reach. This is further compromised by NOM's challenging approval process for outreach activities.

Reduced funding In Iran (Islamic Republic of), the largest refugee hosting country, has impacted the protection space for refugees and asylum-seekers in the country, further reinforcing the growing migration narrative and more restrictive policies on undocumented Afghans, including those with international protection needs. This has resulted in the minimal progress on critical areas of refugee protection, which has been complicated by the general political, and socio-economic situation in the country, and the further politicization of the refugee response.



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